MAPPING THE INDIA - USA- JAPAN STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE IN THE INDO – PACIFIC

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Abstract

The study has focused on undertaking an in-depth analysis of the trilateral relationship between India, US and Japan that has evolved over the last decade in the backdrop of the shifting geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region. For this purpose, the study has examined the three states' foreign policy approaches vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on their trilateral framework of cooperation. The study looks into how these three democracies which share such core values as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, respect for a rules-based order, international rules and norms, have moved closer forging a trilateral relationship and what is the focus of their trilateral cooperation in the region. The study has sought to identify the possible pathways towards building a robust, comprehensive, and sustainable regime of cooperation between the three states. While the changes in their security policies are formed by balancing behaviour towards China, the resurgence and collaboration of these three powers reveal an intricate and profound transformation of the regional order.

Key words: Indo- Pacific, India, Japan, USA, and China

Introducing the area of research

A new chapter in global politics on Indo-Pacific has broadened the scope and contours of the existing Asia-Pacific matrix. Indo-Pacific has become the new way to look at maritime Asia, where an active geographical regional construct characterized by myriad of security risks meets competitive strategic political actors such as Australia, China, India, Japan, and the United States – who are the central players in this region. Adding to the primacy of the region is the growing importance of the Indian Ocean as a geopolitical and geo-economic nerve centre. The reality of the Indo-Pacific involves the intersecting interests of at least four major powers— India, Japan, United States and China—as well as many significant middle players including Australia, South Korea, the Southeast Asian countries, and more distant stakeholders such as countries from Europe and Russia.

The region is undergoing significant structural changes as particularly revealed in the relative decline of the US hegemonic influence in Asia, the growing strategic profile of China, India, Japan and other key regional actors and the emerging traditional and non-traditional security challenges. China's unilateral strategic moves are affecting the strategic balance in the region.

With global shipping, energy resources and fisheries burgeoning into multibillion industries, the need for protection of maritime supply chains, global trade and energy flows and marine environment has been instrumental in raising maritime security objectives to the top of the security agenda of India, US, and Japan. As the home to maritime highways of global trade and energy, the Indo-Pacific region constitutes the primordial artery carrying oil from the Persian Gulf out to power the engines of the global economy. This in turn explains the myriad of emerging strategic dynamics in the Indo- Pacific Theatre.

Besides the threat of growing piracy, the security of these sea routes is important as the two important maritime choke points- Bal al Mandeb and the Malacca Strait are located on the either side of the Indo-Pacific, the region is located at the cusp of anarchy, competition, and inter-dependence all at the same time. Meanwhile economic growth is conspicuously transforming the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, an open, free, and peaceful Indo-Pacific anchored on a rule-based order remains the desired goal.

The focus of this thesis is on the strategic context in which USA, Japan and India relations are gaining significant momentum and evaluates how congruence of strategic interests is shaping the contours of USA-India-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific Region. The convergence of India, Japan and USA relationship in the Indo-Pacific fosters trust and confidence to promote a free, open, rules-based, and inclusive order. Japan, the United States, and India are partners in the Indo-Pacific that share fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. This thesis has examined the India, Japan and USA relation designed as a strategic partnership – a new form of security alignment that does not qualify as an alliance at this juncture. The study finds that the US-Japan-India trilateral look at ways to transcend traditional security cooperation.

This thesis assesses the maritime minilateralism between Japan, India, and the United States and critically examines its efficacy and sustainability to be the net security provider for the Indo-Pacific region. The thesis explores how the Indo-Pacific concept has developed in tandem with a transformation in the regional security architecture in the maritime Asia and facilitates the twenty-first century maritime security cooperation characterized by a range of dualities the reconciliation of contrasting aspects within one idea.

The thesis posits that managing a trilateral relationship will be a complex process. There will rarely be total uniformity of interests on any issue amongst all three partners, and this holds true for the US-Japan-India trilateral. There are different drivers — combinations of interests, values, identity — behind each state's actions in the region. But all three share a vision for security and prosperity for Indo-Pacific and beyond. An anti-China coalition cannot drive US, Japan, and India cooperation. The thesis identifies that the three countries have many shared interests and reasons to cooperate. Pragmatic pursuit of shared interests, economic connectivity that does not translate interdependence into one country's exploitation; rules and respect for sovereignty; the avoidance of force or coercion in resolving international differences, undergirded by realistic expectations of what their trilateral cooperation can accomplish.

The first part of the thesis examines the entire range of convergence of strategic interests between India, Japan and USA. Subsequently, it looks at how continental China contested the term Indo-Pacific. China may not necessarily like the term Indo-Pacific, but a glance at a map shows that the geography of its so-called Maritime Silk Road policy, part of the wider Belt and Road Initiative, is the Indo-Pacific with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, as China militarizes artificial islands in the South China Sea, both commercial and military fleets from across the globe exercise their international legal rights by traversing this shared highway at the heart of the Indo-Pacific. A long game is unfolding in the region, with variants of the Indo-Pacific idea now being unfurled to contest the China-centric geo-economic and strategic narrative of Belt Road Initiative.

Statement of Problem

The "Indo-Pacific" construct, which conceives the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as an interconnected geopolitical and geo-economic space, indicates that this maritime space is no longer considered as a backwater in global politics but is assuming a critical importance in the economic and geopolitical configurations of both the littoral states and world powers. The emerging geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific region depicts a complex interplay of several factors: ranging from the unique geography of the region, an abundance of strategically important natural resources, the growing presence of extra-regional powers to emerging security challenges. The shifting geopolitical dynamics coupled with commonalities in the interests in the Indo-Pacific has been identified as transforming the region into an arena of re-oriented strategic disposition for the littoral states and the global powers including India, Japan, and USA. On the other hand, China has made significant advances in the region, facilitated by BRI. The Indo- Pacific is emerging as key theatre for strategic and economic competition as well as regional engagement.

Review of the existing literature

Reviewed literature includes both national and international scholarly works, some of which include:

"U.S., India, Japan Begin to Shape New Order on Asia's High Seas", by Gordon Fairclough in the Wall Street Journal, discusses for a new Asian maritime-security order that unites democratic powers- India, USA, and Japan to contend with a more-assertive and well-armed China.

Troy Lee-Brown in Asia's Security Triangles: Maritime Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, East Asia volume 35, (2018), argues that the 'Indo-Pacific' is

utilised by Japan, India, and the USA to address deficiencies in Asia's maritime security and institutional architecture. This maritime minilateralism has developed in tandem with the transformation in the regional security architecture in the Indo- Pacific.

Tim Marshall in his book Prisoners Of Geography Ten Maps That Tell You Everything 2016, Elliot and Thompson limited, in a very lucid language has given a detail description of the geopolitics of the 21st century and describes the advantages of favourable geographical circumstances shapes the destiny and determined the fate of the nations.

Bredon J Canon and Ash Rossiter, in The "Indo-Pacific": Regional Dynamics In The 21st Century 'S New Geopolitical Center Of Gravity, Rising Powers Quarterly, Vol 3 Issue 2, 2018, discusses how different countries use the Indo-Pacific to make their choices about the future global order.

Purnendra Jain in The Emerging Significance Of Indo-Pacific: Japan, China US And The Regional Power, East Asian Policy, discusses about the role of major regional powers in the Indo Pacific and how are they contributing to the regional maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the report The United States, Japan, and India: Toward New Trilateral Cooperation, by Centre for Strategic and International Studies Washington DC, August 16, 2007 discusses the trilateral/tripolar framework and captures an evolving trend of convergence in the strategic interests and the way forward for these three key Indo-Pacific players.

India-Japan Strategic Cooperation and Implications for U.S. Strategy in the

Indo-Asia-Pacific Region by Thomas F. Lynch III and James J. Przystup, National Défense University Press Washington, D.C. March 2017, assesses the importance of the India-Japan strategic relationship and analysed this relationship's importance to U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific in the present and the years to come.

This Brave New World India China And the United States, Simson And Schuter Paperbacks, 2016, by Anja Manuel is a perfect book which portrays the how these three countries are working to surmount enormous challenges. It deals with wide range of issues ranging from gender, corruption, domestic politics to issues like energy and environment. Her narratives analyse the Asian scenario of contest and strategy with USA's relation with these two countries and takes us to the optimistic path of bringing India and China together.

Rory Medcalf, prolific writer on Indo-Pacific in his various articles, reports lectures and books such as -The Western Indo-Pacific: India, China, and the Terms of Engagement. Asia Policy, (22), 61-68, (2016), China and the Indo-Pacific: Multipolarity, Solidarity and Strategic Patience, Paper delivered for Grands Enjeux Stratégiques Contemporains – Chaire en Sorbonne Université Paris March 12, 2018, Responding to Indo-Pacific rivalry: Australia, India and middle power coalitions Rory Medcalf and C. Raja Mohan, Lowy Institute for International Policy, August 2014, Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance, Essay in Asia Policy, National Bureau Of Asian Research, July 30, 2019; discusses and considers this region as a mental map and explains the rise of the strategic story of the 'Indian' part of Indo-Pacific . He focusses on the fact that

there cannot be one single Indo- Pacific doctrine dominating the discourse and this holds true for the US-Japan-India trilateral. The region is characterized by a range of dualities- the reconciliation of contrasting aspects within one idea. It

a region where China is the architect as well as influencer of Indo-Pacific and the USA is a follower rather than a leader in the region. China's exertion of authority over areas of maritime interest is mostly through indirect means. It is thus convergence of opportunities and interests in the larger canvas of Indo-Pacific that brings different likeminded potential partners and middle players a vital role in the maritime engagement on issue-based partnership.

Gurpreet Khurana who first coined the term Indo-Pacific and another eminent writer on Indo-Pacific issues in his various writings and presentations : The Indo-Pacific Region: The Emerging Geopolitical and Security Environment Dictus Publishing, January 25, 2018, The 'Indo-Pacific' Idea: Origins, Conceptualizations And The Way Ahead, Journal of Indian Ocean Rim Studies (JIORS) , 2019, Maritime Security and Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific Region Artha-Journal of Social Sciences, 2019, What Is the Indo-Pacific? The New Geopolitics of the Asian-Centred Rim Land, in Geopolitics by Other Means: The Indo-Pacific Reality, edited by Axel Berkofsky and Sergio Miracola ISPI, 2019; discusses about the interests and approaches of key players and geopolitical dimension and imperatives in the region that form the emerging Indo-Pacific reality. He has critically analysed the Malabar naval exercises in his work and analyses maritime security strategies. His work primarily focuses on maritime and naval power which has a crucial role in shaping the geo-political, economic and security environment in the maritime-configured Indo-Pacific region. He has examined the maritime geography, the China factor, new and emerging security challenges which makes a case study of the drivers that mapped the convergence of shared interests of this trilateral- India, USA, and Japan.

Research Gap

Within the wider context of the existing literature on the geopolitics of Indo-Pacific, regional maritime security and flourishing bilateral strategic partnerships involving functional agreements among the three countries this research has been contextualized in light of the onset of the twenty-first century which has seen a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific.

In this context this research studies and identifies what brought India, Japan, and USA together in the broader Indo-Pacific emerging security architecture and assess the challenges and opportunities for the trilateral going forward.

However, the existing literature on the India, Japan, USA trilateral approach vis-a-vis maritime security and connectivity in the Indo- Pacific, lacks a comprehensive study on the subject as only some fragmented works have been done. This research has undertaken an in-depth and inter-disciplinary study on the subject, thereby significantly contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the trilateral convergence in the broader Indo-Pacific framework.

Research Question

The primary questions that will guide the research are:

1. What are the driving factors and forces behind the rapid shift in USA-Japan-India Relations?
2. What are the areas of convergences and divergences in this trilateral relationship?
3. Is Indo- Pacific largely a product of geopolitical imaginations about the perceived ‘rise of China’ -imaginations that are shared among some influential observers and practitioners, particularly in the USA, Japan and India?

4. What are roles played by India, the US and Japan in the changing geopolitical power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Strategic Order?

Significance of the study

A review of the extant literature on India-Japan-USA's relation in Indo-Pacific indicates that deeper trilateral cooperation and more robust strategic conversations between Japan, India and USA could boost regional stability and benefit all three. While these nations have already engaged in preliminary trilateral dialogues and maritime exercises there is huge untapped potential to this partnership that is yet to be explored. This research assumes significance because it addresses these gaps and offers policy framework to elevate the trilateral relationship for a broader trilateral framework. It studies both the convergences and the divergences in this relationship which makes this study unique in this aspect. Given the regional uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific, and the limitations of existing institutions and partnerships, the researcher argues that stronger cooperation and alignment between the three countries could boost regional stability and provide strategic benefits for all three states. Although there have been studies attempted to assess the future of the Indo-Pacific region, very few in any have focused explicitly on the actual and potential forces driving cooperation among India, Japan, and USA across the region from a primarily strategic perspective and their areas of divergences. This thesis would comprehensively fill the niche at a particularly opportune time when the region is on the cusp of unprecedented changes.

Research Methodology

The scenario of the U.S., India and Japan coming closer in the Indian Ocean Region could be explained by employing the theoretical concept of 'hedging,' which in International Relations literature, is embedded into the Balance of Power theory (Jackson 2014, Lim and Cooper 2015, Kang 2007, Roy 2005, Goh 2005). Traditional Balance of Power theory posits that balancing or bandwagoning dictate state behaviour. A balance of power system evolves in which states tend to balance their rivals domestically by acquiring greater military and economic power and/or by building alliances with stronger powers (Waltz 1979, 118, 163). Bandwagoning involves aligning with a rising or dominant state (Walt 1987, 17). In the fluid and uncertain Indo-Pacific security environment the strategies adopted by the regional actors are more complex than a simple choice between balancing and bandwagoning. This has led to the development of several 'middling strategies,' one of which is hedging, which sits between balancing and bandwagoning. The concept of "hedging" implies that a state spreads its risk by pursuing two opposite policies towards another state. A state prepares for the worst by balancing – maintaining a strong military, building and strengthening security alliances and partnerships – while also preparing for the best and engaging – building trade networks, increasing diplomatic links and creating binding multilateral frameworks of cooperation (Hemmings, 2013). The root definition of hedging combines cooperation with competition. The fluid and complex Indo-Pacific geopolitical and geo-economic scenario is increasingly marked by security challenges to regional peace and stability, competition as well as growing economic interdependence and regional engagement. Established and emerging powers like the U.S., China, India, Japan, Australia and the major Southeast Asian states are caught up in a complex web of deepening economic dependencies and growing security uncertainties. As foreign policy issues of states are increasingly multi-

dimensional, states are incentivized to conform to multiple, sometimes competing hierarchies which equates to a hedge (Jackson 2014). The strategic convergence of the U.S., India and Japan in the Indian Ocean subregion can be meaningfully analysed by drawing upon the theoretical concept of hedging which extends the logic of traditional balance of power theory for explaining a wider range of foreign policy behavior of the states including cooperation and engagement while maintaining an emphasis on structural incentives.

This research has employed a qualitative method involving case study approach. The study is based upon empirical analysis and has involved extensive library study and research interview with eminent foreign policy experts, security analysts and practitioners of foreign policy pertaining to this field of study. The primary sources include various interviews, government press releases, government documents and reports issued by the Government of India including the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of External Affairs, the Government of Japan, and the United States White House Official documents. Secondary sources include books, newspaper reports, academic journal articles and digital reports. The author's interview and interactions with many distinguished and renowned scholars have also been selectively included in making assessments. Reference was also made to journal articles, books and commentaries published by various leading think tanks. Thus, the author aimed for a detailed qualitative analysis validated by data which will be crisp yet concerning.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research lies in its two-pronged study. The thesis examines firstly the twenty-first century strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific as being the vital commercial artery of the geo-economics marked by comprehensive competition with elements of co-operation. Undoubtedly, the 21st century will

pave the way for maritime context as the strategic focus for planning, cooperation, and competition among the littoral states in years to come.

The second objective of this thesis is to explore the trilateral -India, USA and Japan's strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific region and their China dilemma. All three democracies have elevated to 2+2 and ministerial-level dialogues and at the same time are exploring the dangers and openings that this oceanic super-area presents. Though the three nations have different interpretation of the Indo-Pacific still they have come together to navigate their common strategic interests. An India, Japan and USA axis can pave a concrete roadmap towards geostrategic roadmap to gain objectives of strategic triangle. The India-Japan-US trilateral is robust in character.

Thus, this research seeks to undertake an in-depth study of the trilateral cooperation among India, Japan, and USA with a particular focus on the growing strategic and maritime engagement that has evolved over the last decade. This thesis intends to outline a policy approach by India, US and Japan towards a cooperative and consultative working framework to address common threats and challenges to regional peace and stability. The study has focused on the analysis of the trilateral relationship between India, US and Japan that has evolved over the last decade in the backdrop of the shifting geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region. For this purpose, the study has examined the three states' foreign policy approaches vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific region with a focus on their trilateral framework of cooperation.

This research thus:

- Examined the key drivers behind the growing increasing engagement among these three democracies,

- This study has assessed the challenges and opportunities that this trilateral face and,
- This research has critically examined and highlighted the strategic alignment and shared commonalities within this trilateral relationship as they navigate the challenging geostrategic 21st century Indo-Pacific region.

Hypotheses

The key hypotheses of the thesis are as follows:

1. The Indo- Pacific geopolitical landscape is intersected with competition and inter-dependence. There are both centrifugal and centripetal forces at work.
2. There may be different drivers — combinations of interests, values, identity — behind each of the three state's actions in the region. But all three- India, Japan and USA share a vision for security and prosperity for Indo-Pacific and beyond.
3. An anti-China coalition cannot solely drive US, Japan, and India cooperation.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study would be in the aspect of procuring data in course of the research interviews with the diplomatic personnel and naval officers engaged in the foreign policy establishment as their responses are likely to be guarded.

Key Research Findings

This trilateral relationship is based on the already existing robust bilateral relationships between the three countries. In an era of growing uncertainties and emerging shift in the geopolitical landscape in the Indo -Pacific have played a significant role in shaping this trilateral partnership. Japan-USA-India trilateral has immense strategic potential as their strategic interests have converged significantly in recent years.

There is an increasing convergence of interests and complementarities of three democracies in the maritime realm. Maritime cooperation and managing the global commons will be a crucial area of focus as the trilateral relationship evolves in the coming years.

The study finds that though there are differences in their approach to the Indo-Pacific, tapping the potential opportunities of converging strategic interests is huge. Secondly, the study finds that all the three governments have been open to new challenges and ideas which may test their partnership. Thirdly, there has been common willingness to manage and preserve their relationship with China peacefully. All the three countries have genuine economic interests to cooperate with China. Fourthly, concerns over China is not the 'only factor' for cooperation among these three countries. There are wide range of issues and potential threats that offers scope for deepening cooperation and exploring opportunities.

Fifthly, the study finds that the strategic value and importance of this minitrilateral (minilateral and trilateral) approach lies in the fact that -it is efficient in realizing and responding to mutual objectives and facilitates rapid decision making.

Through in-depth analysis the study finds that security - especially maritime security is the primary reason behind the India-US-Japan Partnership. India, Japan, and USA share responsibility to manage common maritime and security concerns, a deeper US-Japan-India trilateral cooperation can serve as the foundation for a broader regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region.

Sixthly, the study finds that promoting cooperation, exchanging information, building confidence with composite concept covering economic and energy security would best contribute to this trilateral framework. The time is ripe, and the windows of opportunity are plenty. India, Japan, and USA need to carefully choose the opportunities to chart convergence on common themes to act together to expand the scope of common interests.

The study finds that an area that remains untapped and holds a key potential for cooperation in the future is the competition over networks and cyber platform.

Despite the prospects and challenges in this trilateral cooperation this thesis finds that this trilateral relationship has the potential to become a foundation for engagement with other countries in activities that build regional peace and stability.

The thesis broadly recommends an expansion of the framework for a trilateral cooperation to serve the common challenge and interests especially security and maritime cooperation in the Indo Pacific region. It recommends that Washington, Delhi, and Tokyo also look to deepen their coordination of activities related to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and search and rescue (SAR) exercises. This cooperation could have a tangible

value, considering the propensity for natural disasters in the region and the need for rapid, effective, and multilateral responses.

Chapter Structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the geographical region of Indo-Pacific and the evolution from Asia- Pacific to Indo-Pacific. It examines the geophysical attributes of the region and its geostrategic and geopolitical importance in the 21st century. Furthermore, it provides a detailed discussion and in-depth analysis on the security imperatives in the region.

Chapter 2 studies the foreign policies of India, Japan, and USA vis- a -vis the Indo-Pacific. This chapter is divided into two parts- the first part studies the bilateral relationship among these three nations. It studies how the bilateral relations has evolved over the last two decades which has been the foundation for this trilateral relationship. The second part studies how these three nations perceive the Indo-Pacific region.

Chapter 3 investigates the growing convergence of interests between India, the US and Japan in the Indo-Pacific region. It also examines the areas of divergences in the foreign policy perspectives of the three states vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter 4 examines why the trilateral relationship among Washington, Tokyo, and New Delhi are paying increasing attention to the maritime domain and identifies how the evolution of US-Japan-India relations has and will continue

to impact the larger debate over regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

Chapter 5 is focussed on examining and providing an assessment of China's unilateral strategic moves in the region which is a cause of common concern for India, Japan, and the US.

Chapter 6 provides an overall assessment and key research findings and concludes by offering recommendations.

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